

The changing face of work and family life under COVID-19

POLICY BRIEF.....

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1. Introduction

On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic, leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths all over the world. Until the very beginning of August, Europe¹ reported almost 2 million infected people and 200,000 deaths². In some months, the EU has known a deep economic recession, greatest than the 2009 financial one, with the loss of many jobs, the closure of many businesses³, and many sectors heavily damaged⁴.

The compulsory lockdowns, school closure and teleworking have pushed society into a “new reality and normality” in the family, working and social spheres of life. Parents who can telework are confined at home, trying to balance work, parenting, care and schooling, and are under increasing pressure with further consequences for the mental health of both children and adults⁵.

The vulnerabilities of families have now been magnified significantly with the global pandemic bringing all inequalities to the fore. Since the outburst of the pandemic, COFACE Families Europe has advocated direct help to families through universally designed measures which support all types of families while targeting the most vulnerable, putting ethical considerations, equal treatment and human rights at the core⁶.

non-legislative measures, based on three main pillars: **resources** (decent wages, income support), **time** (flexible work arrangements and employment rights) and **services** (childcare, community-based care)⁷. These three pillars must include extraordinary measures to prevent unnecessary suffering, and ensure a smooth transition towards life after the pandemic.

The transposition of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive must proceed swiftly ensuring adequate payment of leaves, regardless of the type of leave (paternity, parental, carers). Work-Life Balance is not only to be achieved through family leaves. Employment rights and flexible working arrangements are an essential part of the equation. These are key to ensure a decent income to all types of families, to prevent poverty, and to rebalance the gender uptake of leaves and care responsibilities⁸.

Furthermore, families also rely on **care services** every day. The transposition of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive should be now an opportunity to further develop early childhood education and care (inclusive, accessible, affordable and high quality, below the age of 3), and long-term care (quality, community-based, person-centred, for persons in need of support and/or care and a stream of support for carers who have to leave the labour market). Even more so with the current situation of Covid-19.

This policy brief aims to explain how Covid-19 has negatively impacted the situation of families, especially the most vulnerable ones. Furthermore, the brief analyses the different measures taken to mitigate the situation including extraordinary leaves, care vouchers, flexible work solutions, reflecting a mix of measures based on resources, services and flexible working. Last, but not least, the brief is a call for going beyond the implementation of the transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures to boost investment in social and healthcare services to support families.

Reconciliation Pillar	Measure
RESOURCES ensuring decent living standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Labour related income: access to decent wages and tackling the gender pay gapFairer and more equitable tax systemsRemoving implicit bias also from indirect taxation (e.g. VAT)Income Support: benefits and allowances
SERVICES adequate provision of care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Affordable, accessible and quality childcare services for children below 3 years, and between 3 and mandatory school ageAffordable, accessible and quality community-based long-term care services based on person-centered support packages
TIME support for organising working time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adequate family leave schemes (maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves)Flexible work arrangements (job sharing, telework, smart work)

COFACE Families Europe believes the best way achieve a reconciliation economy and society must include a mix of legislative and

2. An unprecedented crisis that has magnified the vulnerabilities of families

In a matter of months, the Covid-19 pandemic has deeply hit the health and well-being of citizens and the economic outlook. The forecasts are gloomy: Eurostat has reported a GDP and employment decline by respectively 11.4% and 2.9 % in the EU during the second quarter of 2020, the more pronounced decline since the European time series started twenty-five years ago⁹. Moreover, the European Commission expects a fall by 7.5% of the EU GDP in 2020, much more than during the 2009 financial crisis, and only to recover by 6% in 2021.¹⁰ As a consequence, the total employment will decline by 4.5% within the EU, and the negative sides will even be more pronounced in some countries due to specific conditions of their economy (e.g.: importance of temporary and precarious jobs, key role of tourism, etc.)¹¹. These data may be taken with great caution as the evolution of the pandemic may, at any moment, worsen.

The vulnerabilities of families have been magnified significantly too with the global pandemic bringing all inequalities to the fore. Two out of five European people consider their current economic situation has worsened in comparison with their situation before the pandemic hit; and one out of two reports their household has strong difficulties to make ends meet. The picture is even darker for unemployed people¹², single parents¹³, people with disabilities¹⁴, older persons¹⁵, refugees, migrants and minorities¹⁶.

Furthermore, the stereotypical and “traditional” distributions of roles, where women are the caregivers and men are the breadwinners, are still very present. At the European level, and before the outburst of the Covid-19 crisis, almost 9 out of 10 mothers in the EU provided daily care for their children, compared to some 6 out of 10 fathers¹⁷.

In number of hours the gap is even wider as working women spend around 22 hours per week in unpaid work and men only 9 hours.¹⁸ This uneven share of care tasks even raises in households with children under 7 years old, where women spend 39 hours on unpaid work, 20 hours more than men do¹⁹.

On the other hand, with a gender pay gap at 16%, and that it has only decreased by 1% in the last eight years²⁰, it is cheaper for a family to renounce a woman’s income instead of the man’s. This inequality has a €370 billion yearly cost for the EU and jeopardises women’s professional careers.²¹

Different reports have stated that during the pandemic the gender care gap is on the increase, with women taking up a disproportionate share of additional household and caring tasks, despite the fact that many men have been teleworking as well²². However, this could be seen as well as the opportunity for fathers to get more involved in household and care tasks²³, rebalance the disparity and trigger a positive change. This will have a long-term impact on women’s employment²⁴ but also on children and other family members in need of care and support.²⁵ The European Commission organised a webinar series on gender-sensitive responses to the COVID-19 crisis, including one looking at good practices on aspects of reconciling work and care.²⁶

As previously said, extraordinary times call for extraordinary and bold measures to boost investment in social and healthcare services, so as the most vulnerable citizens and families do not foot the bill for the current crisis. Moreover, the European Commission recommended in its recent “Country-specific recommendations” that the three dimensions of the European Pillar of Social Rights (equal opportunities, fair working conditions and access to social protection) must be key components of any policy measure decided at both the EU level and nationally to help the economic and social recovery caused by the pandemic.²⁷

The European Parliament on its side, calls on the Commission to work with the Member States on a strategy based on gender equality (equal pay for equal work, targeted work-life balance and family-friendly policies), an ambitious investment plan in affordable high-quality ECEC, as well as long-term infrastructure.²⁸

To address the impact of these economic and social vulnerabilities of families, some EU Member States voted measures between March and September 2020 such as extraordinary leaves, care vouchers, flexible work solutions, reflecting a mix of measures based on resources, services and flexible working arrangements.³¹

3. National responses to support access to resources for families

Due to the magnitude of the current crisis, some EU governments have decided to set up specific and time-limited extraordinary measures to support family incomes under some specific requirements and circumstances. These measures, under the form of extraordinary Covid-19 leaves or income support, are designed to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on European families.

A- Extraordinary Covid-19 leaves

Belgium: For several weeks, the Belgian family organisations, Gezinsbond and the Ligue des Familles, asked for a specific leave for parents with young children or children with special care needs. They also launched a petition²⁹ that yielded more than 18,000 signatures in one week³⁰. The Belgian Federal Government finally adopted on the 14th May a specific parental leave for the Covid-19 crisis. The period was extended from the end of June until the end of September. In order to be able to benefit from this extraordinary parental leave, the worker must have been tied by an employment contract for at least a month. They must also have at least one dependent child up to 12 years old (without age limit if the child has a recognised disability). The leave may also be taken by foster families. The allowance operating from May-September 2020 provided for parental leave on a part-time or 20% basis for all parents.

Single parents and parents with children with disabilities could take the leave on a full-time base. The allowance was around €500 for part-time, and the amount was higher for single parent families and families with dependent children. One of the reasons for introducing parental leave part-time or 20% is to encourage fathers to take up parental leave on this basis. Additional incentives could be envisaged to enable part-time leave to be taken by both parents. 163,000 parents took up the special Corona parental leave, and there is now a special quarantine leave in case of school or day care closure.

Czech Republic: One of the parents with children below 13 years of age could take a "leave of absence" (normally used if a child is sick). The parent received at first 60% of the basic salary but early May, the Czech Parliament raised it up to 80%. This support lasted until 30th June.

Germany: Germany had some temporal changes in the parental leave payments. To dampen the impact of Covid-19, the German government "ignored" the "Corona-reduced" income and took the "normal" income of the parental leave as basis. Moreover, it is now possible to postpone parental leave without losing months, if one of the parents works in a "relevant system" job (health, care, etc.) and cannot take parental leave during this time.

Italy: The Italian government adopted an extraordinary parental leave of 15 days at 50% of the salary, and the alternative, if people did not want to accept this leave, a bonus of €600 to pay for a babysitter. This extraordinary parental leave was available to all employees who have children up to 12 years old. For families of children with disabilities, no age limit was established. If the children are between 12 and 16 years old, the 5 days of special leave was unpaid. In the case of parents working in the private sector, with children between 12 and 16 years old, leave from work for the period of closure of the schools also included a ban on dismissal and the right to remain in employment, provided there was no other parent in receipt of income support or in flexible working arrangements. The 15 days were transferable, divisible and could not be used simultaneously by two working parents.³² Moreover, regarding parental leaves, the "Cura Italia" Decree provided for the right to special leave for children under 12 years of age, an allowance equal to 50% of pay for parents employed in the private sector. With such a Decree, which has a total allocation of €660 million, the duration of leave was extended from 15 days to a continuous or split period of up to 30 days in total, while the period of use was extended from the 3rd May to the 31st July 2020.

Luxembourg: The Luxembourg government established a paid leave to families who have children below 13 years old during the pandemic. Parents of children with disabilities aged 13 to 18 (or up to 25) were granted leave for family reasons if they receive the special supplementary allowance for children with disabilities. This leave could be taken by a parent if there were no other options for the care of the child. If necessary, this leave was transferable between parents. The paid leave was open to all kind of working parents (with contract, apprentices or self-employed). This measure was recently extended until the 25th November 2020³³

B- Income support

Austria: All families received €360 for each child for whom they get family allowances, to address extra-burden during the lockdown. On 15th April the Austrian Minister for families announced a €30 Million Corona Family Hardship Fund to support families through the COVID-19 crisis. To be a potential beneficiary, the household should have its main residence in Austria and have received for at least a dependent child family benefits before the end of February 2020. Furthermore, at least one of the parents should have either lost the job due to the pandemic or reported a decrease of hours. Self-employed people were also eligible if they proved their financial situation had worsened. Last, but not least, the household income could not go beyond a certain threshold.³⁴

Czech Republic: The self-employed persons could apply for a 6-month waiver of health insurance payments and pension insurance premiums. The waivers covered the amount of the minimum insurance premium, which are around CZK 4,986 per month (€ 190). The submission deadline for the declaration of income and the expenditure for the self-employed and the settlement of social security contributions for 2019 were postponed by three months. Moreover, a compensation bonus of CZK 500 per day (€ 20) was paid out to all self-employed, if their income was lowered due to anti-Covid measures, from 12th March to 8th June. Many parents, including single parents, are self-employed, but at the same time they also have small employment contracts. The problem is that many of single parents have small employment contracts which jeopardise their eligibility for this self-employed bonus: many single parents could not access the bonus because of their very small amount of monthly income.

Finland: The parent, guardian or spouse of a child living in the same household could receive an “epidemic” paid support, as well as unemployment benefits for self-employed persons.

The support is available if the child to be cared for is in early childhood education, in pre-school education, in basic education years 1-3 class, or if there is a decision on the need for special support or extended compulsory education. The support is also paid to a person who has arrived in Finland from abroad and been directed to quarantine-like conditions. The short-term financial assistance was granted for the period that the emergency conditions were in force, that is, between 16th March to 15th June 2020. Due to caring for a child, only one person at a time could receive support in the same household. Laid-off or unemployed persons could not receive epidemic support. Nor could a person on maternity, paternity or parental leave or care leave receive this support.³⁵

France: Since the beginning of the lockdown, the French government kept incomes through massive recourse to partial unemployment benefits, which were granted very freely. For those workers whose economic activity was maintained but had to go to work, there has been the possibility either to resort to partial unemployment or to obtain work stoppages as if they were on sick leave. After the 1st May, there could be a shift from these sick leaves into the possibility of partial unemployment, unless at least a parent can telework. In such case, the recourse to such work stoppages or partial unemployment was not and is not legal yet. Later on, any parent could apply for partial unemployment due to school closures, unless one of the parents can telework. Regarding the aids for families, they have been very targeted. On 15th May, the government provided €150 for all households, with children or childless, receiving the French minimum income. Moreover, €100 were awarded per dependent child for certain families (those receiving housing benefit or income support).

Last, but not least, in August, a raise of €100 per child in the annual back-to-school allowance (received by around 40% of parents of children aged 3 to 18).

Germany: Families received a €300 “child bonus” for each child for whom there is an entitlement to child benefits, during September and October 2020, for at least of one of these two months, during 2020. This bonus does not take in account other potential social benefits such as the basic income support or advance maintenance payments. Neither is taken into account as an income in the case of the child supplement and housing benefit. The bonus is paid automatically with the child benefit. On their side, low-incomes families can receive a monthly child allowance (KiZ) of up €185. Whether and how much the KiZ is paid depends on several factors (on your income, housing costs, size of the family, age of the children, etc.). Single parents receive too financial help, as the sum they are relieved to pay from tax income will shift from the current €1,908 euros to €4,008 euros for 2020 and 2021. The relief income is directly paid and single parents do not have to wait therefore the tax return³⁶.

Greece: First of all, workers employed in sports, artists who work in amusement recreational centres where many people are gathered, as well as all other types of employees whose activities are attended by groups of people, are getting a special allowance of €800 per month. Furthermore, the Greek government decided to raise the Minimum Guaranteed Income for families with children (single parents are included) in a specific benefit in May. Families received an additional income of €100 for the first child and €50 for each subsequent one, with a maximum of € 300 for each family. Some 64,000 persons benefitted from this measure.

Italy: Families in difficulty because of the Covid-19 emergency received extraordinary financial support, in two instalments of between €400 and €800 each. Moreover, €840 were allocated to families with persons with severe disabilities.

Spain: The Spanish government adopted an extraordinary subsidy for workers who deliver personal and household services, whose employment was totally or partially ended during the pandemic and who do not have regular unemployment benefit. The subsidy amounts to 70% of their salary. In addition, on 19th May 2020, a minimum income framework was introduced under the premise “leave no one behind” which is expected to be taken up by over 2 million persons, especially those facing social exclusion, providing special protection for single-parent households and victims of domestic violence and trafficking.

Lithuania: In order to mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic, especially for the most vulnerable families, the Lithuanian government entitled recipients of pensions and social assistance benefits, large families and low-income families (especially single mothers) to receive a lump sum of €200. Moreover, the benefit paid to persons with disabilities, children from large or low-income families was raised to €40. Last, but not least, self-employed and freelance workers could claim a flat-rate benefit. They were also able to avoid compulsory health insurance payments during an emergency and quarantine, which will be payable within two years from the end of the emergency and quarantine.³⁹

4. The new reality demands a rethink of flexible working arrangements and employment rights

Work-life balance is not only to be achieved through family leaves and income support. Employment rights and flexible work arrangements (FWA) are an essential part of the equation, and the EPSCO Council adopted conclusions in June 2020 on “Enhancing Well-being at Work” acknowledging the links between workplace practices and work-life balance, and formulating a mix of recommendations.³⁷ Indeed, FWA allow workers to better reconcile professional and private life, as well as increasing their productivity, motivation and their professional progression, reducing absenteeism, boosting chances for entering the labour market and raising gender-equal opportunities.³⁸

Before the pandemic, employees considered there were still higher barriers to take-up of FWA, such as a potential negative impact on future careers, stigmatisation from colleagues and lack of support from management.⁴⁰ A recent Eurobarometer survey on work-life balance indicates that over half of employees in the EU cannot change their work schedule, almost three workers out of ten feel that they are discouraged from taking family leave by managers and supervisors. One out of three workers claim that making use of flexible working arrangements has a negative impact on their career.⁴¹

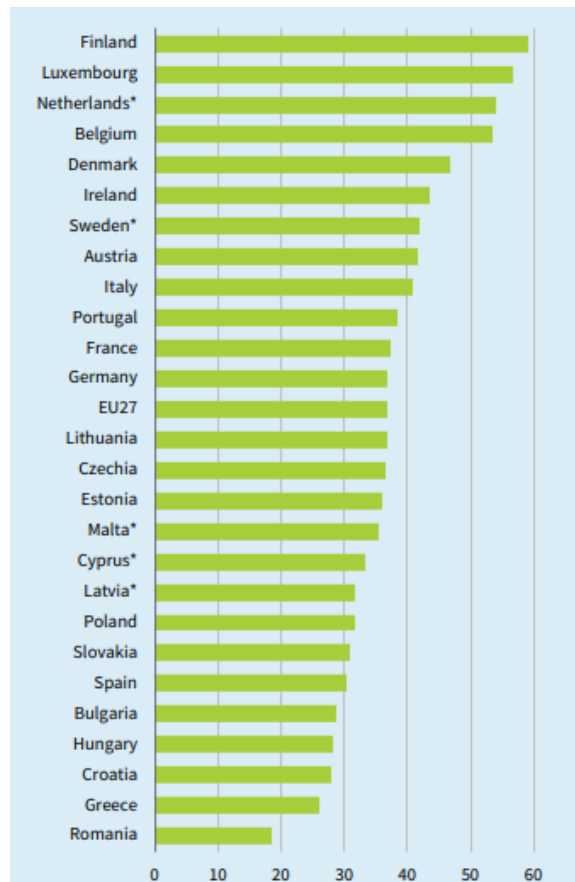
The pandemic has certainly worsened these figures. First of all, and as previously said, unemployment, precariousness and job insecurity have risen: one out of twenty workers in the EU declared losing their jobs permanently, one out of four temporarily⁴². Moreover, one out of five workers consider that their job is jeopardised in the short term.⁴³

Then, with the closure of offices and the compulsory lockdowns, many employees have been teleworking from home, and some reports underline that one out of three workers had to do so, while only one out of twenty did so before the pandemic⁴⁴.

The number of people teleworking is unequally shared in the EU as high differences remain between sectors⁴⁵, Member States, regions, the division between urban and rural areas, etc. Recent reports underline that the Nordic and Benelux Member States have the largest share of people who have switched to telework, that employees working in capitals have, on average, nine points more of potential teleworking than their national average.⁴⁶ (Table 1).

Teleworking can have both positive and negative effects, which will be emphasised in an unprecedented situation like the current one. The European Commission stressed the importance of both FWA and teleworking in sustaining jobs and production during the pandemic⁴⁷. Moreover, the work efficiency is increased and time savings as commuting times are decreased.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the decisions of EU Member States to impose an almost “total lockdown” gave both employers and workers very little time to prepare full teleworking arrangements. A decision that was taken as a short-term answer and very limited in time has been now going on for months, is still going on, and has become the “new reality” in many countries and sectors.⁴⁹



Note: *Due to the lower response rate, the results for Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden have low reliability.

Table 1: Proportion of workers who started teleworking as a result of COVID-19 by country (%)
Source: Eurofound (2020)

On the negative sides of teleworking during the pandemic, tensions within families have been exacerbated during the pandemic lockdowns and their aftermath due to a sum of mental and financial stress and a more challenging work-life balance, especially for those with young children, where parents became primarily responsible for childcare and sometimes home schooling.⁵⁰ Indeed, 22% of households with children under 12 years old underlined difficulties with focusing on their job, which is three and four times more than the ones with respectively children between 12-17 years old and childless⁵¹. (Table 2). On the same line, a survey done by the Belgian association Ligue des Familles on 3,500 parents, revealed that 4 out of 5 Belgian parents who telework, while caring for their family, were not able to work as they should⁵².



Table 2: Work–Life conflict dimensions, by type of household, EU27 (in percentage)
Source: Eurofound (2020)

Furthermore, a fifth of EU employees underlined difficulties during the pandemic to disconnect from work, a figure which raises to three out of ten for those who are teleworking⁵³. The possibility with ICT and technology of being always connected can lead to the negative side of “*working anytime, anywhere*”⁵⁴, with an overload of work, psychosocial problems such as a potential risk of isolation, stress and depression⁵⁵. As a consequence, work-life balance could be negatively affected (Table 2).

These concerns are expressed too by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). It underlines that teleworking must not be seen as an opportunity to raise the employees’ workload and that the latest must have a “right to disconnect”⁵⁶.

There is no specific EU legislation that regulates the specific problem of the “right to disconnect”, although some EU Member States have tackled this issue (such as Belgium, France, Italy or Spain)⁵⁷. The European Parliament is currently discussing a legislative initiative report whose rapporteur is MEP Alex Agius Saliba⁵⁸.

The aim of the initiative report is to recommend that the European Commission “*adopt a Union directive to ensure that workers are able to exercise their right to disconnect and to regulate the use of existing and new digital tools for work purposes*”⁵⁹. The Employment and Social Affairs Committee is expected to vote on the report in December 2020. If approved, the European Parliament will vote the legislative initiative in Plenary Session during the Spring 2021.

In the meantime, some countries such as **Malta**, or organisations such as the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** have either adopted specific measures or set up recommendations on how to deal with potential negative sides of teleworking during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Maltese government adopted financial measures to support both employees and employers who have decided to go on teleworking during the pandemic. Both employers and employees receive economic support to invest in technology that allows for teleworking, which covers a certain amount of the total cost.

The idea is to improve work-life balance, while, at the same time, decreasing commuting time, emissions and energy consumption and reinforcing female participation in the job market. The support is aimed to cover up to 45% of the total costs with a limit of €500 per teleworking agreement and €4,000 per company. The costs must have been incurred between the 15th February and the 8th May 2020⁶⁰.

The ILO set up a guide with good practices and specific recommendations to employees, employers and policy makers to limit potential negative sides of teleworking on Covid-19 times and beyond. On the work-life balance side, ILO recommends the following⁶¹:

- Support employees with children or/and with other care responsibilities who may feel challenged to fulfil their work commitments. Specific measures could be **special parental leave schemes**;
- Fostering cooperation and dialogue between employees and their hierarchy, fixing clear and achievable objectives and workload, as well as offering flexible working arrangements;
- Employees must disconnect from work at specified times reserved for private life without fearing negative consequences on their professional careers.

5. An urgent need to boost investment in social and healthcare services

Families need adequate resources, flexible working arrangements and employment rights, but they also rely on care and support services every day. Services, such as **early childhood education and care** and **long-term care**, are crucial for people to reconcile the different aspects of their lives such as family, work, health, care, leisure, or education.

This unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic has led to lockdowns, school closure and teleworking, which have pushed society into a new reality in the family. Families are now under high pressure and therefore need basic infrastructure.

One of the lessons learned during this pandemic is that care should be at the core centre of our economic system. Last 19th of May, COFACE Families Europe issued an open letter to Presidents of the EU Council, Commission and Parliament, calling for mobilisation of current and upcoming EU Funds to support families and carers who are suffering the consequences of this COVID-19 pandemic and need immediate and adequate support.

The letter called for appropriate forms of gender- and age- sensitive assistance and support for persons with disabilities, their families and caregivers. It urged bold actions to mobilise investments and resources to ensure continuity of care and education for children and adults with support needs, through additional funding to these sectors. It also underlined that persons with disabilities and their carers need accessible information on available services, training, in-home support, respite services, financial help to buy IT and assistive devices, income support and/or the possibility to take up extensive and adequately paid carer and parental leaves⁶².

Indeed, the care sector has been highly damaged during the last months where women are overrepresented, most of the time in low quality jobs (low salaries, high levels of precariousness and poor working conditions), which do not match the key societal values of this sector.⁶³ Women do represent three out of four of all care workers in the EU, nine out of ten childcare and healthcare workers, four out of five formal long-term care in people's homes, and 95% of domestic cleaners and helpers⁶⁴.

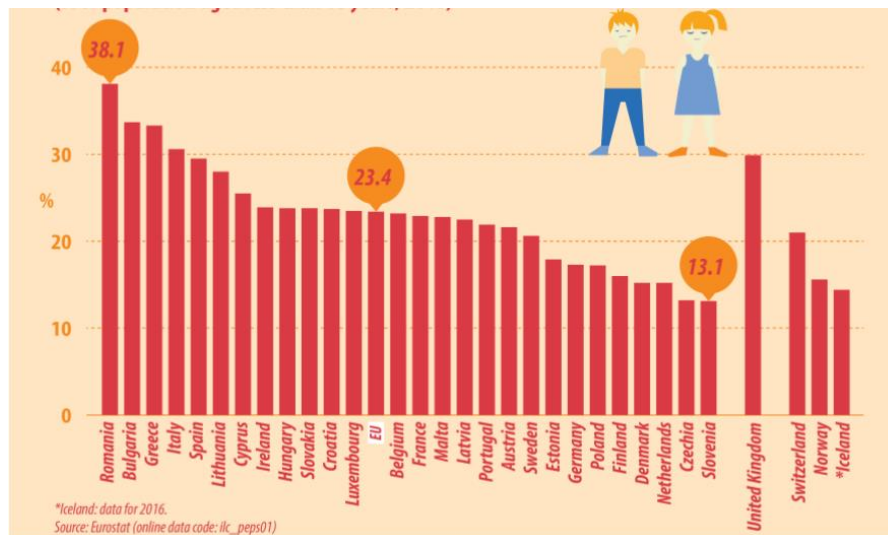


Table 3: EU children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (in percentage)
Source: Eurostat (2018)

A- Investing in ECEC so as children do not foot the bill of the Covid-19 crisis...

The EU has underlined the need for children from difficult socioeconomic families to benefit from targeted actions to hone their development and tackle social exclusion⁶⁵, and the European Commission recently launched a public consultation on building a European Child Guarantee.⁶⁶ COFACE Families Europe has always advocated for inclusive, accessible, affordable and high quality services in the communities⁶⁷. The recent European Pillar of Social Rights (Principle 11) goes on the same line. These services can decline the risk of poverty of children and their families, boost social and healthy development of children, and have other socio-economic benefits (decline of gender gaps in employment, increase of women participation in the labour market, etc.)⁶⁸. And most especially when the figures are stark and speak for themselves.

Before the pandemic, one out of four children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, the highest age group.⁶⁹ (Table 3). Child poverty means family poverty and the risk of poverty rates are higher for single-parent households than they are for the overall population⁷⁰: three out of four very low work intensity and half of low work intensity households with dependent children were facing risk poverty⁷¹.

Moreover, two out of five people living in single-parent households in the EU face risk poverty, twice as much as the whole population. (Table 4)⁷². These figures could have raised as unemployment also raised in the last months.

What's more, the lockdown and the closure of schools and day care has severely hit child well-being and education, but even more so for certain groups of the population who have a more difficult access to formal services, including households with low income, poorly educated people, migrants and ethnic minority women.

During the last months, unequal access to online schooling for low-income and vulnerable families who lack equipment and who cannot even afford a decent meal for their children have raised inequalities. Participation in quality childhood education is key to tackle inequalities, as many skills that shape a person are honed during the first years of life.⁷³ Furthermore, the unaffordability of early childhood education and care for many families is one of the factors which foster inequalities in childcare use, especially for families with low incomes, single parents, children with disabilities and large families.⁷⁴

	Total	Single person	Single female	Single male	Single person with dependent children	Two adults with three or more dependent children	Two adults at least one aged 65 years and over
EU-27	16,8	26,1	26,7	25,3	34,2	24,5	11,4
EU-28	17,1	26,2	26,9	25,2	35,3	25,6	11,9
Belgium	16,5	23,8	23,8	23,7	41,3	25,0	15,7
Bulgaria	22,0	39,8	46,3	30,0	30,0	51,2	16,8
Czechia	9,6	27,8	34,3	17,5	30,1	15,7	4,1
Denmark	12,7	26,7	26,2	27,3	27,2	12,4	2,2
Germany	16,0	30,4	30,6	30,1	33,8	16,7	13,2
Estonia	21,9	55,3	58,3	50,3	39,0	14,7	22,6
Ireland	14,9	40,9	44,8	37,1	36,3	15,2	6,4
Greece	18,4	18,7	19,3	17,7	32,8	23,3	9,0
Spain	21,5	21,0	20,5	21,7	42,9	36,2	16,0
France	13,3	16,1	14,4	18,5	32,1	26,6	5,6
Croatia	19,3	44,4	48,9	36,5	36,7	31,1	23,5
Italy (*)	20,3	25,3	27,9	21,9	37,8	37,1	13,1
Cyprus	15,4	21,1	23,7	18,6	24,2	21,2	21,7
Latvia	23,3	52,6	57,3	42,8	32,6	20,7	33,5
Lithuania (*)	22,9	47,9	50,7	43,1	48,4	44,3	16,0
Luxembourg	18,2	27,8	31,6	24,5	41,5	30,1	6,8
Hungary	12,2	20,0	19,7	20,4	31,5	11,6	9,3
Malta	16,8	26,4	33,9	19,2	48,6	27,3	25,5
Netherlands	13,2	24,1	22,6	25,8	29,6	14,6	10,9
Austria	14,3	22,7	25,3	19,5	37,0	25,2	9,5
Poland	14,4	31,4	30,4	33,5	28,6	17,6	11,4
Portugal	17,3	26,1	27,7	23,0	28,3	31,6	15,0
Romania	23,5	31,6	37,2	23,5	41,6	53,4	16,9
Slovenia	13,3	40,0	41,7	37,9	24,7	15,8	8,9
Slovakia	12,2	17,2	15,4	20,6	36,7	36,7	3,6
Finland	12,0	29,0	27,7	30,4	24,4	12,0	3,7
Sweden	16,3	30,8	34,1	27,4	34,6	24,7	5,1
United Kingdom	18,9	26,8	28,8	24,6	40,2	32,1	15,4
Iceland (*)	8,8	21,8	23,0	20,8	24,9	8,0	1,2
Norway (*)	12,3	25,7	28,5	22,7	28,6	13,1	1,3
Switzerland	15,0	19,9	21,8	17,7	33,8	25,5	18,8
North Macedonia	21,9	8,5	7,7	10,1	33,5	50,2	15,1
Serbia	24,3	34,3	34,8	33,7	36,5	53,6	16,9
Turkey (*)	22,8	15,1	16,9	12,4	28,5	48,3	11,5

(*) 2017

(*) 2016.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_ii03)

Table 4: Risk of poverty or social exclusion, by type of household (in percentage)
Source: Eurostat (2020)

What's more, the lockdown and the closure of schools and day care has severely hit child well-being and education, but even more so for certain groups of the population who have a more difficult access to formal services, including households with low income, poorly educated people, migrants and ethnic minority women.

During the last months, unequal access to online schooling for low-income and vulnerable families who lack equipment and who cannot even afford a decent meal for their children have raised inequalities. Participation in quality childhood education is key to tackle inequalities, as many skills that shape a person are honed during the first years of life.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the unaffordability of early childhood education and care for many families is one of the factors which foster inequalities in childcare use, especially for families with low incomes, single parents, children with disabilities and large families.⁷⁶

COFACE has always advocated with the European Alliance for Investing in Children, and during these tough times even more, for a **European Child Guarantee** to support children in vulnerable situations, breaking the cycle of disadvantage through a two-generation approach combining support to both children and their family or kinship carers. This should be set within a policy framework based on the European Commission 2013 "Recommendation Investing in Children" and the upcoming "EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child"⁷⁷ to be launched in the first quarter of 2021.

ECEC services should be:

- **Accessible:** Accessibility can be read in two ways: geographic accessibility and under a disability lens;
- **Affordable:** If the price parents have to pay is too high, there will be no incentive in using the service, especially if the out-of-pocket component has to be paid upfront and part of it will only be reimbursed via tax benefits;
- The **Quality** of the service is essential. No parent will enrol a child into a poor quality service. There are many dimensions to quality (trained and motivated staff, staff/child ratio, improved education, well equipped staff, etc.)⁷⁸

The European Economic and Social Committee has recently called Member States to use EU funds to increase the supply, affordability and quality of services and infrastructure for early childhood education and care⁷⁹.

B- ... but neither people with disabilities, ageing people and the care sector professionals: there is an urgent need to invest in Long-Term Care (LTC)

Older people and people with disabilities are among the most affected group people during the pandemic. However, some organisations have reported failures of the LTC sector in Europe⁸⁰: lack of access (a third of EU citizens live in households with unmet needs for professional care)⁸¹, problems with staff (care workers are scared and not fully equipped with protection).

Moreover, long-term care is a highly gendered issue, as previously underlined. Family carers are mostly women, who due to the lack of support, often have to reduce or stop their participation in the labour market, with consequences on the gender-pay gap and gender-pension gap and on the quality of life, social inclusion and wellbeing of their families as whole. A large share of informal LTC is provided by people who are older than standard retirement age. Women often leave the labour market to take care of dependent family members or they are likely to accept lower qualified positions or/and atypical working hours to accommodate their family duties upon their return⁸².

The European Pillar of Social Rights states that everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services (Principle 18), but the European Commission 2018 Country Specific Recommendations which addressed long-term care looked mainly at its financial aspect, requesting Member States to contain costs and to look at the economic sustainability of the sector and of national budgets⁸³. These views need to be reversed: cutting public social and health services cannot help build a resilient society and economy.

COFACE Families Europe, and namely its COFACE Disability platform for the rights of persons with disabilities and their families, has always advocated to reform care policies by combining the availability **of affordable, sustainable and quality** community-based services for persons in need of care and informal carers, with the recognition of carers (giving them the possibility to access financial compensation social security measures for their care work), work-life balance for working carers and improvement of working conditions in the formal care sector⁸⁴.

6. Conclusion

The vulnerabilities of families have been considerably amplified by the global pandemic, and has raised all the different existing inequalities. The picture is even bleaker for the most vulnerable families (unemployed people single parents, families with members with disabilities and dependency, refugees, migrants and minorities families).

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary and bold measures. COFACE Families Europe therefore calls for the following:

- There is an urgent need to provide direct assistance to families through universal measures that support all types of families while targeting the most vulnerable, with an emphasis on ethical considerations, equal treatment and human rights. This support should include a mix of resources, flexible working arrangements and services, with extraordinary measures to prevent unnecessary suffering and ensure a smooth transition to life after the pandemic;
- The transposition of the EU Work Life Balance Directive must proceed swiftly ensuring adequate payment of leaves regardless of the type of leave (parental, carers);
- Work-Life balance is not only to be achieved through family leaves: employment rights and flexible working arrangements are essential too;
- Families need adequately paid leaves but they also rely on care services every day. The transposition of the Directive must be an opportunity to further develop early childhood education and care services.

Members of COFACE Families Europe will continue advocating for these measures, raising awareness, and expect the EU Institutions and national governments to implement these important and very needed social rights for families.

¹ European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries and the United Kingdom

² European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2020), Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the EU/EEA and the UK – eleventh update: resurgence of cases,

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-rapid-risk-assessment-20200810.pdf>

³ Nine out of ten SMEs in the EU are directly and indirectly affected by the measures against Covid-19. Furthermore, 40% of EU SMEs complain over a drop in sales of 50%. See SME Europe (2020), SME Impact Assessment for Covid-19 – Survey Presentation, <http://www.smeurope.eu/sme-impact-assessment-for-covid-19/>

⁴ OECD (2020), Evaluating the initial impact of COVID-19 containment measures on economic activity, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126496-evgsi2gmqj&title=Evaluating the initial impact of COVID-](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126496-evgsi2gmqj&title=Evaluating%20the%20initial%20impact%20of%20COVID-19%20containment%20measures%20on%20economic%20activity)

[19 containment measures on economic activity](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126496-evgsi2gmqj&title=Evaluating%20the%20initial%20impact%20of%20COVID-19%20containment%20measures%20on%20economic%20activity)

⁵ Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>

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⁹ Eurostat (2020), News Release Euroindicators – 8 September 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10545471/2-08092020-AP-EN.pdf/43764613-3547-2e40-7a24-d20c30a20f64>

¹⁰ European Commission (2020), European Economic Forecast, spring 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/ip125_en.pdf

¹¹ The forecasts of Southern Member States such as France, Italy or Spain are darker: losses of both the GDP and the total employment in 2020 by 8-10%, European Commission (2020), *Ibid.*

¹² Four out of five of unemployed people estimates the great difficulties to make ends meet, Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, *op.cit.*

¹³ Almost 9 out of 10 single parents are women. Half of single mothers are at risk of poverty or potentially facing exclusion, twenty points more than single fathers, EIGE (2020), Unpaid care and housework <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/unpaid-care-and-housework>

¹⁴ A third of women with disabilities has already suffered house violence, in comparison with a fifth of women without disabilities. EIGE (2020), People in vulnerable situations, <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/people-vulnerable-situations>

¹⁵ According to the World Health Organisation, two out of five of total confirmed COVID-19 related deaths in Europe have occurred in long-term care facilities, and in some countries, the figure raises to three out of five. AGE Platform (2020), Joint Press Release “ A call for the EU Parliament to investigate the tragic impact of COVID-19 on long-term care across the European Union”, <https://www.age-platform.eu/press-releases/call-eu-parliament-investigate-tragic-impact-covid-19-long-term-care-across-european>

¹⁶ Migrant people, living or not in refugees' camps, are very vulnerable to Covid-19: difficulties to access to proper sanitary conditions, access to tap water, difficulties with the language, etc. EIGE (2020), People in vulnerable situations, *op.cit.*

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²⁰ ETUC (2020), EU gender pay gap won't end until 2104 without action, <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/eu-gender-pay-gap-wont-end-until-2104-without-action>

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<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20200306-1>

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²⁶ More about the webinar series here

https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/webinar-series-gender-sensitive-responses-covid-19-crisis_en

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²⁸ See the Draft Report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on "A strong social Europe for Just Transition - Communication from the Commission", https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/FEMM/PA/2020/09-21/1212792EN.pdf

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https://www.petitionenligne.be/conge_specifique_coronavirus

³⁰ La Ligue des Familles (2020), Un congé spécifique pour soutenir les parents durant le confinement, <https://www.laligue.be/Files/media/502000/502599/fre/2020-04-01-un-conge-specifique-pour-soutenir-les-parents-en-confinement.pdf>

³¹ For an overview of measures beyond Europe, please check the 2020 review of by the International on Leave Policies and Research, which includes a sub-section on policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for parents and carers (up until June 2020)

<https://www.leavenetwork.org/annual-review-reports/review-2020/>

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³³ <https://quichet.public.lu/en/entreprises/ressources-humaines/conges/situation-perso/conge-raisons-familiales.html>

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³⁵ https://www.kela.fi/web/en/news-archive/-/asset_publisher/IN08GY2nIzZo/content/temporary-financial-assistance-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak-for-persons-on-unpaid-leave

³⁶ More information about the German benefits to families during Covid-19 can be found here (in German): <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/corona-pandemie/finanzielle-unterstuetzung>

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https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2185_470_ENG

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, *op.cit.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Half of the employees working in knowledge intensive services reported teleworking in 2015, twice as much of those on manufacturing sector and twenty points more than those in services declared so. OECD (2020), Productivity gains from teleworking in the post COVID-19 era: How can public policies make it happen?, <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/productivity-gains-from-teleworking-in-the-post-covid-19-era-a5d52e99/>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* and OECD (2020), Capacity for remote working can affect lockdown costs differently across places, <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/capacity-for-remote-working-can-affect-lockdown-costs-differently-across-places-0e85740e/>

⁴⁷ European Commission (2020), European Economic Forecast, spring 2020, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ Eurofound (2020), Regulations to address work-life balance in digital flexible working arrangements, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef19046en.pdf

⁴⁹ ILO (2020), Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: a Practical Guide, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_751232.pdf

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⁵¹ Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, *op.cit.*

⁵² Ligue des Familles (2020), Un congé spécifique pour soutenir les parents durant le confinement, *op.cit.*

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https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/EMPL-PR-654061_EN.pdf

⁵⁹ Article 12 of the "Draft Report with recommendations to the Commission on the right to disconnect"

⁶⁰ Annalise Desira from the Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance of Malta, Gender equality aspects of work and care in the context of COVID-19 webinar, organised by the European Commission in June 2020,

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What is COFACE? The Confederation of Family Organisations in European Union (COFACE Families Europe), is a pluralistic organization at the heart of civil society, which aims to promote universal policies for all families based on values of gender equality, human rights, intergenerational solidarity and non-discrimination. We do this within the legislation, programmes and initiatives of the European Union.

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